

# The ATSDR Ombudsman

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*om-budz-man*  
a neutral  
conflict  
resolver

The ATSDR ombudsman is an independent, neutral resource service for all parties concerned with environmental health disputes involving ATSDR. Finding enough common ground to establish a workable agreement between each faction is the ombudsman's primary objective.

When all routine avenues have been exhausted, the ATSDR ombudsman can be called to impartially investigate, mediate, and assist in areas where the "system" has failed. In doing so, this office is not an advocate for the interests of ATSDR, nor is it an advocate for business, nor industry, nor private citizens, nor any other government entity. It is an advocate for problem resolution.

## Who can use this service?

The ATSDR ombudsman's services are independent, and open to all parties—private citizens, citizen advocacy groups, corporations, as well as federal, state and local government entities.

Only three criteria must be met. The caller must

1. have environmental health concerns involving ATSDR;
2. believe that they are not being heard; and,
3. *have exhausted all other resources.*

## What can the ATSDR ombudsman do for me?

### Listen

First, and foremost, the ATSDR ombudsman *listens*, and attempts to understand all sides of the issue.

### Offer Alternative Sources

Initially, the ATSDR ombudsman recommends and helps the requestor reach other government and nongovernment resources for resolution. If these have all been tried and the conflict remains, the ATSDR ombudsman takes a more active role.

### Investigate

To get a clear picture of the issues, the ATSDR ombudsman undertakes an independent, fact-finding investigation. This includes an impartial investigation of governmental decisions as well as a nonjudgmental assessment of each party's expectations.

### Mediate

Based on the facts while being sensitive nontangible issues, the ATSDR ombudsman helps all parties find a common ground. When people are no longer in a "win-lose" situation, relationships replace conflicts and solutions emerge.

### Recommend

Once a workable agreement is reached, the accord is put in writing and signed by all parties. The ATSDR ombudsman also signs the document as an observer/witness. If, in spite of all efforts, an agreement can not be reached, the ATSDR ombudsman prepares a detailed, written report outlining the facts and presenting the ATSDR ombudsman's recommendation on the issues and any related matters. This document is then presented to the ATSDR Assistant Administrator and is available to the public.

## What can't the ATSDR ombudsman do for me?

### 1 The ATSDR ombudsman can not *impose* a solution on any party.

All resolutions are strictly voluntary. The ATSDR ombudsman is independent and has the power to investigate, mediate and recommend, but the ombudsman has *no power of enforcement*.

### 2 The ATSDR ombudsman can not reverse a decision.

Should the ATSDR ombudsman discover that errors were incurred during the ATSDR investigation, appropriate recommendations for corrections are presented to the ATSDR Assistant Administrator for action. However, the ATSDR ombudsman can not require or ensure the action or outcome.

### 3 The ATSDR ombudsman can not produce miracles.

Before any conflict can be resolved, each party must be willing to look at other sides of the issues. When everyone works together, it is likely that each side will walk away with some of what they wanted to achieve, but it is unrealistic to expect everything. The goal is to find enough common ground to develop a workable agreement that everyone can live with.

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## Who is the ATSDR ombudsman?

Ronnie D. Wilson, the ATSDR Ombudsman, has recently established ATSDR's first ombudsman program. Mr. Wilson comes to ATSDR from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) where he served in a variety of public-related capacities, from 1975 until 1998. During the last two years, he was the EPA Region IV ombudsman.

Prior to joining EPA, Mr. Wilson served as a public affairs officer in the U.S. Army. Following his discharge from active duty in 1973, he continued to serve in the U.S. Army Reserves in a variety of public-related positions until his retirement in 1996.

Mr. Wilson has also served in a volunteer capacity on the Board of Directors, as a former Vice President of the Spina Bifida Association of America. Currently an adjunct professor at the Central Michigan University, Mr. Wilson teaches Legal Aspects of Health Care and Environments of Administration.

Mr. Wilson holds a BS in Journalism from Arkansas State University, an MSA in Health Care from Central Michigan University, and has earned a Law degree from Woodrow Wilson College of Law in Atlanta, Georgia.

## How do I contact the ATSDR ombudsman?

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This document is also available at:  
<http://atsdr1.atsdr.cdc.gov:8080>

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